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SUBJECT: U/S HUGHES' MEETINGS WITH QATARI FOREIGN MINISTER
AND SHEIKHA MOZAH

Classified By: Ambassador Chase G. Untermeyer, reasons 1.5 (b&d)

11. (U) Summary: U/S Karen Hughes visited Doha Feb 17-19 to attend the US-Islamic World Forum, sponsored by the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution and the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While in Doha, she met with the Foreign Minister and Sheikha Mozah, wife of the Amir. This cable reports on these two meetings. U/S Hughes' Feb 18 Doha meetings with Al Jazeera management and staff will be reported septel. End summary.

Meeting with HBJ

12. (U) U/S Hughes met 18 Feb with Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani (HBJ) in the Ritz Carlton Hotel, Doha, on the margins the US-Islamic World Forum. Also attending were Ambassador Untermeyer, Qatari ambassador to the US Nasser al-Khalifa, and staff members from both sides.

13. (U) U/S Hughes began by saying, "The President very much appreciates the key alliance we have with Qatar and your letting us have our troops here." They then proceeded to discuss several topics:

Qatar's Economy

14. (C) HBJ (whose primary title is First Deputy Prime Minister) said, "The economy will continue to do well for a few more years. We doubled GDP three times in the last 10 years, and by the end of this year we will double it again. We are trying to invest it the right way. We have a team in the US trying to buy 50% of a big property firm in Washington, DC. Also, a bank and investments in Europe and Asia."

Qatar's Membership on the UN Security Council

15. (C) HBJ said, "It is good to be there, but it is maybe a bad time, with Syria and Iran coming up. They (the UN) expect you to do more than you can do."

Iran

16. (C) In response to U/S Hughes' query on Qatar's view of what Iran is doing, HBJ said: "We have been telling our friends in the United States for a long time that Iran is the biggest threat. I was there last month and saw Ahmadinejad. He is too proud of himself and his nation. We are worried about their nuclear program, because if something happens in Bushehr, it will hit us first. We are nearer to Bushehr than

it is to Teheran.

"The Iranians sneak around. You think you have a deal with them when you don't have a deal. They are always on the edge. I don't trust them.

"We need a signal from Russia and China. If (Amadinejad) gets the wrong signal, he'll be like Saddam and do the wrong thing. Unfortunately, they have had some wrong signals (from Moscow and Beijing). Your position is known.

"I don't see a solution. They want their own weapon, and they will have it. We need solidarity. I'm not sure about sanctions and what (the Iranians') reaction will be."

¶17. (C) HBJ said he is preparing a letter for SecState Rice saying it is time for her to meet with her counterparts from the GCC to discuss the situation in Iran. "In the end we'll (have to) be together on this, so why not talk now? My advice to the United States is that your friends here need to know what you are thinking of doing."

¶18. (C) HBJ expressed some discontent over Sec Rice's visit to Abu Dhabi, saying, "It was not well planned." He said that if she came a day later, she could meet with GCC leaders. He himself had an engagement in Monaco.

Hamas

¶19. (C) HBJ said that when he and the Amir met with Hamas representatives (9 Feb), "We told them, 'OK, you have been elected. Now you have to change and work for peace, build up health care and education and take care of people's needs.'"

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They said that is their first priority. But they said if someone puts a precondition on us, it won't work. They said they have to respect all (peace) agreements and have to talk (with Israel). They have a different mentality. We told them that (governing) is not an easy matter like sending rockets and killing Israelis. They have got to care about what they say. They promised this is what they will do."

¶10. (C) U/S Hughes said the US was pleased with the "free and fair" election the Palestinians held. "But we are also a democracy. We have laws, and our laws forbid us to help a terrorist organization. We want to help the Palestinian people."

¶11. (C) HBJ said of such aid, "You are going to have to give it to the Palestinian Authority. They (Hamas?) say it will be 100% transparent. Hamas will be different (from Fatah). They are more organized; they are sincere." He said Qatar will continue to give cash assistance through the Arab League at a rate of \$3 million a month, along with a small-loan bank "regulated in the right way" as well as some hospitals that Qatar will build itself.

Al Jazeera

¶12. (C) At the end of her visit, U/S Hughes raised Al Jazeera, calling it 'the only thorn on the rose'. She said she had "a good visit" with AJ senior management that morning: "I told them we have seen some improvements but would like to see more."

¶13. (C) HBJ said, "They are changing now. They have their international advisory board that was just here. I told you before that they would do that." He said there is also a "small board" in place for only six months to "correct a fight" at Al Jazeera, which post believes refers to tensions between Al Jazeera Arabic and the new Al Jazeera International (in English).

¶14. (C) U/S Hughes continued, "I told them we need to do a better job of providing spokespeople" from the USG to go on the air. HBJ concurred and suggested the USG help Al Jazeera to do positive stories on US efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. "In Bosnia you did great things," he said, "but nobody knows it or talks about it."

Meeting with Sheikha Mozah

¶15. (U) U/S Hughes, accompanied by Ambassador Untermeyer, met 19 Feb with Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al-Missned, consort of the Amir of Qatar and chairperson of the Qatar Foundation, in her office at Education City outside Doha.

America's Image in the Arab World

¶16. (U) U/S Hughes asked Sheikha Mozah (SM), "If you had my job and had to help tell America's story, how would you do it?"

¶17. (C) SM replied: "You have to change your image. We were always looking to America as a model for democracy. But after September 11th (2001), things changed. There was the invasion of Iraq, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo -- it really was terrible. I know the argument that Saddam was worse than what you have now in Iraq. But you have to understand the character here. It's 'you and I against enemies and strangers'. So whatever harm Saddam did, the feeling was, 'He's an Arab, so OK.' But after you invaded, we feel we've all been attacked in our homes.

¶18. (C) "In Iraq, you'll be wasting your time if you try to rectify your image. I don't think you're going to win. What you should try to do is start a good story, and you have the chance in Palestine. It could change your image in the Arab world. I've been hearing the rhetoric about Hamas. But you have to try them, to give them a chance. His Highness (the Amir) is a big friend of Hamas and can play a great role there. At least Hamas will be trusted on the Arab street."

The Arc Project for Palestine

¶19. (C) Sheikha Mozah spoke of the RAND Corporation study called the Arc Project, proposing infrastructure and social services for a Palestinian state made up of disparate

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territories divided by Israel and linked by an arc-shaped railroad running from Gaza to the West Bank. Sheikha Mozah said, "We are willing to support this and lead the whole initiative. But we can't do it without support from the US. And nothing came back (from Washington) saying that America supports this."

¶10. (C) Ambassador expressed surprise at this, for at no point was Embassy Doha ever asked to convey the Arc Project to Washington and seek an endorsement. After U/S Hughes left Doha, Ambassador learned from RAND that there never was in fact such a request to the Embassy. It seems that Sheikha Mozah asked former SecDef Frank Carlucci, when the RAND Qatar advisory board met in Doha last year, to find out if the USG would back the Arc Project.

¶11. (C) Ambassador promised to relay a message to Washington outlining the Arc Project and asking whether USG is willing to endorse the plan (at no expense to itself).

Women

¶12. (C) U/S Hughes praised Sheikha Mozah for Qatar's efforts to give women greater opportunities and roles. "President Bush feels very strongly that women will change the Middle

East," she said, prompting Sheikha Mozah to say, "We shouldn't disappoint him!" U/S Hughes said, "With women like you, that won't be a problem. But what can we do?"

¶13. (C) Sheikha Mozah recommended that whatever the US does for women in the Middle East, it should be done "backstage". She advised, "Don't show yourself. Whatever you do will be stamped with the American label and will be rejected. Be careful."

¶14. (C) Speaking generally of Qatar's attitude toward women, Sheikha Mozah said, "We don't believe in a division (between men and women). We looked at other countries and saw that male colleagues were scared by (women) showing aggressiveness. Whatever we do in Qatar in health and education is for men and women. Our elections were for both -- not men first, then women. We're a small society, like a family. Some elements in society here may want to delay women's progress in society, but they can't stop it. Twelve percent of our lawyers are women."

Foundation for the Future

¶15. (C) Sheikha Mozah said Qatar announced at a Foundation for the Future organizational meeting in Bahrain that it is willing to give free land for a FF headquarters in Doha. Since then, she said with a tone of regret, they have heard nothing in response to this offer. In fact, she has heard it may be located in Jordan. She also complained that early planning for the FF excluded NGOs, which she said "was not very clever". She also said "to brand (FF) as an American foundation would not benefit you or us. It was announced as something supported by America, the EU, and others. It is not wise for you to be (seen as) the only player."

Education

¶16. (C) U/S Hughes asked about Qatar's success with charter schools, noting that "the educational establishment" in Texas opposed them at first. Sheikha Mozah said, "Same here! After a while, they established themselves. The first results show charter schools are doing much better than other schools. People have more confidence in them. A delegation from other Gulf countries will come and see what we're doing."

¶17. (U) U/S Hughes said, "You're really a great example throughout the entire region. I'd love to support it with anything I can do, maybe by fostering greater exchanges."

¶18. (C) Sheikha Mozah mentioned her desire to have a branch of the US Military Academy in Education City. U/S Hughes said, "This is a really good idea, really interesting. I think Sec Rumsfeld would be intrigued with it. He's a big advocate of international military training."

¶19. (C) As for a future school of communications in Education City, Sheikha Mozah said, "We are working with (the University of) Missouri." (Note: This was the first indication that she has chosen MU for this role. Only two

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weeks before, Missouri was just one of a list of potential campuses. End note.)

Other Topics

¶20. (C) Sheikha Mozah spoke of her membership on the board of the UN's Alliance of Civilizations, which soon will meet in Doha. U/S Hughes said, "The number-one thing we need to do is undermine the notion that the West is at war with Islam. It plays to the extremists. I was the one who strongly urged the President to go to a mosque after 9/11." Sheikha Mozah said,

"That was excellent."

¶21. (C) U/S Hughes mentioned that USG will soon bring over an Al Jazeera reporter on an exchange program. This prompted Sheikha Mozah to say, "They need it!"

¶22. (C) U/S Hughes closed the meeting by saying, "We need to make sure you meet the President. He's like you -- very frank." Sheikha Mozah said, "My husband says he's a very committed man; you can trust his word."

¶23. (U) The Hughes' delegation did not have an opportunity to review this cable.

UNTERMEYER